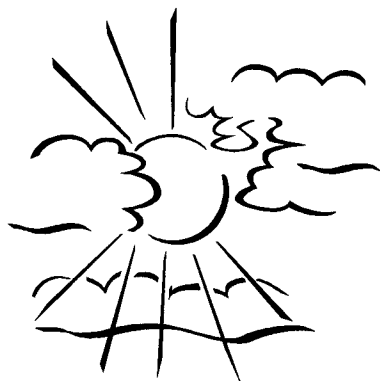


***Department
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Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, May 9, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

TOPIC	PAGE
*Welfare Reform	2-4
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	5-13
Health Care	14-20
*Foster Care	21-31
Elder Abuse	32
Adoption	33

House, Senate Differ On Welfare Approach

MIRS, Monday, May 8, 2006

The Department of Human Services (DHS) budget and a corresponding supplemental bill designed to implement the House Republican's welfare plan, haven't left the lower chamber yet, but both are guaranteed to cause problems in the Senate.

Last week the House Appropriations Subcommittee voted to move the \$4.42 billion DHS budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 to the House floor (See "[House GOP Push Welfare Reforms In DHS Budget](#)," 5/4/06). And on Tuesday morning, the House Appropriations Committee plans on reporting out of committee, a supplemental bill ([HB 4309](#)) that implements many of these reforms.

Both budget bills include a 48-month lifetime limit for welfare recipients. A change that Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** vetoed last year because she thought it would kick off from public assistance those people who followed the rules, but couldn't save enough money to make it on their own.

Despite the governor's veto, House Republicans are determined to get the limit and other reforms included into the state budget. If the state doesn't include reforms that match up with federal guidelines in the budget by Oct. 1, 2006, the federal government will fine the state for not complying with federal laws, said Rep. Jerry **KOOIMAN** (R-Grand Rapids), the driving force behind the changes.

"I'm not sure where you discuss it if you don't discuss it in the budget," Kooiman said.

The problem is Sen. Bill **HARDIMAN** (R-Kentwood), the chair of the Senate DHS Appropriations Subcommittee, said he's not sure the budget is the best place to address lifetime limits.

"I'm not sure that will be in the budget," Hardiman said. "We're still reviewing it (the budget) and we're still putting together a proposal. I think lifetime limits are something we'll have to speak to but what that will be, I'm not sure."

The budget can address some welfare reform, such as including funding for additional staff, but Hardiman insinuated that the lifetime limit should not be addressed in the budget. He continuously suggested lifetime limits would be better addressed in follow-up bills.

The problem with addressing welfare reform in the budget is that the budget only lasts for a year and then has to be revisited, Hardiman said.

"If you're looking at changing a system on a long-term basis it would have to be done outside the budget," Hardiman said.

Kooiman agreed that some of the reform, including lifetime limits, would need follow up bills, however, the savings the state would see with lifetime limits have to be included in the budget, he said.

"I don't know how you budget for next year if you don't account for something you're intending to do and that's welfare reform," Kooiman said.

Hardiman isn't as anxious as Kooiman is to just put something in the budget because it might reflect potential savings. Instead, Hardiman mentioned taking a closer look at a new welfare reform proposal the DHS recently introduced.

The proposal would extend the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) pilot programs. JET pilots are already in four counties and aim to help welfare recipients get jobs through training, education and advocacy. The intention of the

program is to more effectively get people out of the system and on their feet.

The DHS estimates the program will save the state about \$12 million because it will permanently get people out of the system. The JET programs do not include a lifetime limit.

"The goal will be the same," Hardiman said when comparing the JET program to lifetime limits. "We want to move people toward self sufficiency."

Kooiman held fast to his opinion that it's absolutely necessary to get the lifetime limit in the budget and supplemental. His argument is that expanding the JET program alone isn't going to be enough to satisfy the federal requirements. That's why including the requirements in both budget bills is a priority, he said.

"That's the position of the House," Kooiman said.

Michigan Report

May 8, 2006

WELFARE REFORM BUDGET BEFORE APPROPS. PANEL

The House Appropriations Committee will take up Republican-pushed welfare reforms in a supplemental budget on Tuesday.

The reforms (see Gongwer Michigan Report, May 4, 2006) include a lifetime limit on cash assistance of 48 months in an effort to meet federal work requirements, which have yet to be outlined by Congress, by October 1. The budget supplemental bill is HB 4309.

Testimony on making English the official language of the state, as well as discussion on more ethics legislation will also be part of the committee agendas as the House prepares for a relatively quiet week.

Officials are still working out which ethics bills to take testimony on. Last week, the House Oversight, Elections and Ethics Committee HB 5985, HB 6011, HB 6017 and HB 4983, which would ban acceptance of honoraria for all state elective offices, provide a zero dollar reporting for all food and travel paid for by lobbyists, prohibit any out-of-state travel paid for by lobbyists and require of funds paid to a legal defense fund.

Chair of the committee, House Majority Leader Chris Ward (R-Brighton) said there are still six other bills that have to be brought before the committee.

The chamber is expected to act on three Senate bills (SB 1171, SB 1199 and SB 1229), which are part of a package of prohibitions on protesting at funeral services, after they come out of committee this week.

Tuesday, May 09, 2006

Dad to turn himself in after shooting death of boy Detroit man faces charges of child abuse, possession of marijuana after his gun goes off.

Norman Sinclair / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Joseph Link III, the father of a 3-year-old boy who shot himself April 24 with a gun he found under a mattress, was expected to turn himself in to authorities by this morning, according to Detroit police.

Wayne County Prosecutor Kym L. Worthy said Monday she authorized warrants charging Link, 25, with second-degree child abuse, possession of a firearm during a felony and possession of marijuana.

Police investigating the shooting found the marijuana inside the home.

Link told police he had left his son, Joseph Link IV, alone as he took out the trash. As he came back into the house on Cheyenne, he spotted the youngster with the gun just as it went off, striking the boy in the head. The boy died two days later at Children's Hospital.

Second-degree child abuse carries a maximum penalty of four years in prison. The felony firearm charge draws a mandatory two-year sentence that is served consecutively to any other sentence, and marijuana possession is a misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in the county jail.

Following the shooting, the Wayne County Sheriff's Department stepped up publicity for its gun safety program, which includes handing out trigger locks to the public.

"In little over two weeks since the shooting, we handed out 100 gun locks at our station in Highland Park and about 60 at the road patrol station in Westland," said department spokesman Sgt. Larry Crider.

"These are all avoidable tragedies," Sheriff Warren Evans said. "We are providing these trigger locks so families can be safe from intruders and so parents won't have to worry about their own children's natural curiosity."

The locks are provided by Project ChildSafe, a nationwide program dedicated to safe firearms handling and storage practices among gun owners.

Trigger lock kits can be picked up at the Road Patrol, 3100 Henry Ruff, Westland; the Administration Building at 1231 St. Antoine, in downtown Detroit; and the Highland Park mini-station at Woodward and Manchester.

You can reach Norman Sinclair at (313) 222-2034 or nsinclair@detnews.com.

The Detroit Free Press

May 9, 2006

DETROIT: Father is charged with abuse after boy's gun death

The death of a 3-year-old boy who grabbed a loaded gun April 24 and shot himself in the head has resulted in the father being charged with second-degree child abuse, the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office said Monday.

Joseph Link III, 25, of Detroit was charged in the death of his son, Joseph Link IV, on April 26.

The boy's father reportedly told police that he stepped out of his son's mother's home in the 15000 block of Cheyenne to take out the trash and, when he returned, found his son staring down the barrel of his handgun.

The gun went off and the bullet passed through the boy's head, officials said. The child died at Children's Hospital. The father told police he found the gun, a .38-caliber revolver, a year ago.

On Sunday, the Child and Family Abuse Unit of the prosecutor's office issued a warrant charging the father with second-degree child abuse, a 4-year felony; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony, a 2-year offense, and possession of marijuana, a misdemeanor.

Link, who could not be reached Monday for comment, was expected to turn himself in for arraignment today in 36th District Court in Detroit, officials said.

Court takes kids in sex-abuse case

Tuesday, May 09, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

ALLEGAN -- A judge on Monday took jurisdiction over four children prosecutors say were sexually and physically abused in an Allegan area home by three generations of men from two families.

The legal step, Allegan County prosecutors say, is part of an effort to terminate the parents' rights.

The children's father, 27, and his father, 56, are charged with first-degree sexual assault for allegedly molesting several children in the home. Police said seven children lived there, from 11 months to 9 years old, including the 27-year-old man's four children.

Another man, 73, the great-grandfather of three children from another family at the residence, is charged with child sexually abusive activity and using a computer to commit a crime.

A child-neglect petition filed in Allegan County Family Court alleges the 26-year-old mother of the four children knew about ongoing abuse that spanned at least three years.

It also alleges she was aware of a 1993 sexual-assault conviction for the 56-year-old man and was advised in July 2005 by Child Protective Services that he should not be left unsupervised around her children.

Court records show police found more than 8,000 pictures of child pornography involving children in the home.

The father and mother in court Monday have four children: two boys, ages 3 and 4, and two girls, ages 7 and 8. A termination hearing will be set.

Another couple, the parents of the other three children in the home, voluntarily relinquished their parental rights last week.

Baby left in SUV; mom charged

Southfield case called 'risky behavior'

May 9, 2006

BY FRANK WITSIL

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A 23-year-old Detroit woman who police said left her baby girl alone in an SUV on Sunday while she went shopping in a Southfield store, was charged Monday with contributing to the neglect of a minor, a misdemeanor.

"You would think we would learn by now," Southfield Police Chief Joseph Thomas said Monday. "We have to watch our children better."

Thomas said Erica Lancaster left her daughter in the 1997 Ford Explorer with windows open about a few inches at 7 p.m. in the parking lot of a Meijer on Telegraph.

The baby, who was not quite 5 months old, was not injured, police said.

The child was in the custody of child protective services on Monday, Thomas said.

As temperatures get hotter, health care workers and police warn of the danger of leaving kids -- especially babies -- in cars.

Temperatures in closed vehicles can be much higher than they are outside -- even with the windows open, and unlocked vehicles invite kidnapping, Oakland County Chief Deputy Prosecutor Deborah Carley said Monday.

Thomas said that Southfield police are especially vigilant about protecting children left in hot vehicles because in 2002, Tarajee Maynor of Detroit left her 3-year-old son and 10-month-old daughter in a sweltering car for hours and both children died.

Maynor was charged with first-degree murder; she pleaded guilty to second-degree murder.

Carley said she hopes that charging Lancaster will send a message to others that it is unsafe to leave children alone in vehicles.

"It's unbelievably risky behavior," she said.

According to the police report, when officers arrived Sunday, the driver's side door was unlocked and the baby was covered with sweat.

A paramedic examined the baby and she was then taken to Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak for additional treatment.

The outside temperature was 66 degrees, but it was 88 degrees inside the SUV, Carley said.

Lancaster, who apparently was paged through the Meijer intercom system several times, was found about an hour later and arrested, police said. If convicted, she faces up to 93 days in jail.

Had the child been injured, Carley said, Lancaster could have faced charges that were more serious.

"You wonder why?" Thomas said. "Why would someone do that to a child?"

Contact **FRANK WITSIL** at 248-351-3690 or witsil@freepress.com.

Mother Charged with Leaving Baby in Car

By Brandon Truttling

Web produced by Christine Lasek

May 9, 2006

A Southfield mom accused of leaving her infant inside an SUV while she went shopping faced a judge Tuesday.

Erica Lancaster, the 23-year-old mother, was accused of contributing to the delinquency of a minor, a 90 day misdemeanor.

Lancaster was crying in court, which officers say is a 180 degree change from how she acted when officers first approached her.

Erica's 5-month-old baby was found inside an SUV in the parking lot of a Southfield Meijer.

A detective with the Southfield Police Department explained, "The officers report that she appeared to be emotionless, and wasn't too concerned and never asked about the wellbeing of her child."

Police say the child was left inside Lancaster's SUV for nearly an hour and a half.

"The child was wrapped in a cotton blanket, in a car seat, and buckled. The child was reportedly crying hysterically and sweating profusely," the detective explained.

Besides the infant in question, Lancaster has an 8 year-old, a 6-year-old, and a 4-year-old. All 4 children are currently separated from their mother, who is behind bars.

Lancaster will appear in court later this month, and although she has no prior criminal history, she will remain in jail unless she can post 10% of a \$2,500 bond.

Forgiveness not coming in infant's death

Tuesday, May 09, 2006

DARRYL Q. TUCKER
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Derrien Cooper and Laportsher D. Ewing were crying when they said they will never forgive the day care operator who killed their 6-month-old son, Derrius Cooper.

Lakesha L. Mims should spend the rest of her life in prison, the couple told Saginaw County Chief Circuit Judge Robert L. Kaczmarek on Monday.

Kaczmarek sentenced Mims, a mother of two, to 18 to 50 years in prison for murdering the infant.

"There is no justification for what she has done," Derrien Cooper said. "She should spend the rest of her life in prison. It's only right. What gives a person a right to take a life?"

Ewing said she has difficulty explaining to her 6-year-old daughter that she will never see her brother again.

"Why? Why my baby?" Ewing asked. "You didn't have to take my baby. You should die in prison."

When Mims, 29, pleaded guilty to second-degree murder, she said frustration overwhelmed her and that she had a lot on her mind Dec. 29, 2004, the day she killed Derrius at her day care center, 1915 Joslin.

Derrius was sleeping in an upstairs bedroom when she went to get him, she said. She said she picked him up, then flung him down, causing a skull fracture.

Mims said she was sorry and asked for Derrius' parents to forgive her. She said she loved Derrius from the first time she saw him.

"I wasn't trying to kill him," she said, turning to Ewing and Cooper. "If I could take it back, I would. I really pray that you forgive me one day."

Mims said once she realized what she did to Derrius, it was too late.

Ewing responded that all Mims had to do was call her and she would have come to get her son.

Assistant Prosecutor Paul M. Fehrman said Mims was not sorry, and he noted she bypassed two Saginaw medical facilities while taking Derrius to a Saginaw Township hospital for treatment.

"She's not sorry," Fehrman said. "She's sorry she got caught and has to pay a penalty."

Mims' 18-year prison sentence is a gift, he said.

The pain

Derrius was a momma's boy, Ewing said.

"He was such a happy baby," the tearful mother said. "It hurts so bad. There's nothing you can do to ease the pain. I miss him so much. I ask God to send him back."

It's painful to deal with his son's death, Cooper said, pausing occasionally because he was overcome with emotion.

Cooper said he remembers kissing and holding his son.

"It seems like yesterday he was born," Cooper said. "He was my world, my heart, my soul. All I ever wanted was to watch Derrius grow. We lost Derrius forever."

State Family Independence Agency workers took custody of Mims' two children, police said.

Mims, a Buena Vista High School graduate, voluntarily surrendered her day care operator's license.

Darryl Q. Tucker covers courts for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9686.

OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Orphans of the Storm

By IRWIN REDLENER
The New York Times

Published: May 9, 2006

IF you thought that the government's response to last year's Hurricane Katrina was a shocking display of mismanagement and incompetence, you should see what's happening to the displaced children of families now trapped in FEMA's trailer parks and other shelters.

Hurricane Katrina and the floods that followed destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes, forcing out more than one million people. Some families have found housing and jobs in communities that could accommodate the influx, but a far bleaker reality faces the rest.

FEMA has not released exact numbers, but school officials estimate that displaced children from Louisiana alone number more than 125,000. Most of their families were living in poverty before the hurricane. Now they subsist in tiny trailers, hastily assembled by the government in remote fields with few dependable services, little access to community resources and no sense of when they will be able to return to some version of normal life.

Several recent studies, including one by Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health and the Children's Health Fund, reveal that unmet health care needs among these displaced families are far worse than any of us imagined.

One in three children in FEMA-subsidized shelters has at least one chronic illness like asthma requiring medical care. Half of the children who had access to medical care before the storm no longer do. And although nearly half the parents in the shelters report that their children exhibit symptoms of emotional or behavioral disorders, the evaluation and treatment they urgently need is almost impossible to secure.

Health isn't the only problem for those languishing in FEMA shelters. Nearly one in four school-age children is either not enrolled in school or misses 10 days of class every

month. Many who do attend school in their temporary host communities find the classrooms overcrowded, the staff exhausted and stress levels unbearably high.

Thanks to the hard work of local officials and Congressional delegations from the affected states, billions of dollars will be available to repair levees, rebuild communities and re-establish the economy of the Gulf Coast. But this will take years, far too long for the children who are now suffering and waiting in FEMA's shelters. They urgently require an emergency relief package that directly addresses their most pressing health care needs.

For \$100 million — a small fraction of the billions allocated for reconstruction — the government could support a force of at least 200 pediatricians and family doctors, 100 specially trained mental health workers, 25 mobile medical units and a much strengthened school-based health care network throughout the gulf region. It could also put vital health care information in a computer database and set up virtual access to medical centers for children who can't get to specialists' offices.

We are watching the worst children's health crisis in modern American history unfold in the gulf area. After the trauma of Hurricane Katrina, this secondary disaster — again under the auspices of the United States Department of Homeland Security — may have far more serious consequences. Thousands of children are now seemingly abandoned by a federal government still unable to function effectively when it counts the most.

Irwin Redlener is the director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia and the president of the Children's Health Fund.

Our View: Health insurance bill better than nothing

Midland Daily News

05/09/2006

As usual, the devil's in the details.

The Senate this week is expected to vote on a bill that would make it easier for small businesses to offer health insurance to their employees. Businesses with two or more employees could partner to form "associations" and buy group health insurance.

While the lower costs should mean insurance for people who currently don't have any, there are points to ponder. The American Cancer Society in particular has been vocal about the bill, because it allows employers to choose "bare bones" health plans that would sidestep state mandates to cover certain procedures, such as mammograms.

In a perfect world, free or reduced-cost mammograms would be available for all women, of course. But we don't live in such a world. In the real United States, there still are far too many adults who work for small companies that don't offer much in the way of health insurance, and they either do without or pay whopping amounts to buy it on their own.

This plan is by no means perfect. But it is better than nothing, and for thousands of Americans, it will be a great improvement.

Fighting for Michigan's Uninsured

To raise national awareness about the human and economic costs of an estimated 46 million Americans who lack access to basic health coverage, the first week in May is

In Michigan, we're proud to lead the way in the search for innovative and uniquely American solutions. In just three years, we have extended affordable prescription drug coverage and health care coverage to more than 292,000 people. That includes 35,000 citizens who are taking advantage of the MiRx prescription drug discount card. Our goal is to extend affordable health care to every citizen in this state.

We've already taken the first steps toward that goal with the introduction of the Michigan First Health Care Plan. The plan will cover more than 500,000 uninsured citizens through a new financial partnership with the federal government. It will create new, affordable insurance products for individuals and it will make it more attractive for small businesses to offer coverage to their employees.

We're already implementing this plan for affordable health care for all of Michigan's citizens. We're working with the federal government to give us new flexibility in managing our state resources, and we're working with private health care organizations to provide affordable coverage.

Expanding access to affordable health care is a key part of my overall economic plan. It's a moral issue for our families; it's a competitiveness issue for our businesses; and as Governor, it's an issue that I'm going to continue to fight for on behalf of all Michigan citizens.

Pharmacists push docs to e-prescribe

Electronic orders might save money

May 9, 2006

BY KATIE MERX
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

State and national pharmacy groups today are expected to launch an initiative to entice more Michigan doctors to use e-prescribe technology.

Michigan ranks 10th in the nation for electronic prescribing, the nation's pharmacy groups said Monday.

The **National Association of Chain Drug Stores**, the **National Community Pharmacists Association** and **SureScripts** -- a network provider of electronic-prescribing services -- awarded the SafeRx award to the 10 states doing the most electronic prescribing as a percentage of prescriptions written.

The pharmacy groups also singled out Michigan doctors Narinder Batra of Adrian, Margaret Dowling of Taylor and Mark O'Brien of Algonac for incorporating the technology into their practices.

Electronic prescribing, also known as e-prescribing, is believed to help avoid potential drug complications and save money by reducing adverse drug effects and increasing the use of generic drugs.

Dowling said she's an avid user of e-prescribing because: "It's safer for the patient and saves the patient money." It also saves her staff time calling in prescriptions and refills.

In e-prescribing, a doctor enters the prescription into a computer in his or her office.

Every time a doctor enters a brand-name drug into an e-prescribing system, the computer suggests a less-expensive generic version if one exists. It also checks for potentially harmful drug interactions and allergies. Once the prescription is complete, it's transmitted electronically to a pharmacy.

Henry Ford Medical Group's pilot program and a collaborative e-prescribe program involving **General Motors Corp.**, **Ford Motor Co.**, **DaimlerChrysler Corp.**, **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan** and the **Health Alliance Plan** are cited as contributing to Michigan's top 10 ranking.

Today, the **Michigan Pharmacists Association** and local pharmacies connected for e-prescribing are to fax and mail a survey to the state's physicians to help them determine if those who don't e-prescribe have the technology to do it.

"The pharmacy industry estimates that 150,000 physicians have paid for the necessary technology and aren't using it," said Tammy Lewis of Alexandria, Va.-based SureScripts.

"They may not need to spend more money to do e-prescribing."

The assessment will help doctors determine whether they already have the necessary technology in their offices, how much time and money they are spending doing traditional prescriptions and what is necessary to e-prescribe.

For more information, call 866-797-3239 or visit www.GetRxConnected.com/MI.

Contact **KATIE MERX** at 313-222-8762 or kmerx@freepress.com.

TOP 10 STATES FOR E-PRESCRIBING

• **1. Rhode Island**

2. Nevada

3. Massachusetts

4. Maryland

5. Florida

6. Delaware

7. Virginia

8. North Carolina

9. Ohio

10. Michigan

Source: SureScripts

U.S. gears up for Medicare plan enrollees

Web, phone staff ready for deadline

May 9, 2006

BY KATIE MERX
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

The federal government doesn't expect any technical glitches to interfere with last-minute enrollments in the Medicare prescription-drug program this week, Medicare Administrator Mark McClellan said Monday.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has tripled the capacity of its information and enrollment Web site, www.medicare.gov, since enrollment began in November.

And it's increased the number of counselors working the official Medicare phone lines to more than 6,000 for the week.

"We are doing all we can to prepare for a last-minute surge of interest," McClellan said. This is the last week that most Medicare-eligible Americans can enroll in the new prescription-drug program and get 2006 benefits. The enrollment deadline for the program is Monday. Those senior and disabled citizens who are eligible for the program now and don't have some other form of drug coverage will pay a monthly penalty if they wait and enroll in the future.

After Monday, the next opportunity to enroll begins Nov. 15 for benefits beginning Jan. 1, 2007.

Medicare ramped up its resources for the last week to avoid some of the problems it experienced during the first week of enrollment in November 2005. During that first week, seniors had difficulty getting through to Medicare counselors on phone lines, and Michigan senior agencies reported that the federal enrollment Web site frequently didn't work.

McClellan said those problems shouldn't occur this week. Traffic on the Web site has been increasing for several days.

"We're getting more calls, several hundred thousand a day," McClellan said, "and the Web site is still operating under 20% of our server's capacity."

Contact **KATIE MERX** at 313-222-8762 or kmerx@freepress.com.

DRUG PLAN HELP

- Call Medicare at 800-633-4227, visit www.medicare.gov or call the Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program at 800-803-7174.

You'll need:

--

- Your Medicare card

--

- Your list of medications, including frequency and dosage

--

- Your pharmacy's name

--

Medicare drug plan

Bay City Times Editorial

Tuesday, May 09, 2006

Less than a week lies between seniors and others who are enrolled in Medicare saving a bundle on their drug costs, or paying more than they must for the rest of their lives.

That's the bottom line of the May 15 deadline to sign up for the new Medicare Part D drug prescription program.

Most have already heard that its array of private drug insurance plans is confusing.

Maybe that's why, as of March, only 7.2 million of the 23 million people who ought to register with the national program did.

The lack of people enrolling is the strongest argument for Congress to get on the stick this week and pass an extension to the May 15 deadline.

Missing that deadline could very well mean a penalty of higher drug insurance premiums for current Medicare clients who missed it. The law opens enrollment into the plan from Nov. 15 to Dec. 31 each year.

People can sign up by mail and by phone 24 hours a day.

But the best way is by using the Internet. Advice, answers to questions and most forms are all available at www.medicare.gov.

Online signup doesn't need to be intimidating.

Family, friends or neighbors can help, and computers are available at all public libraries.

Just do it, if you haven't yet.

Right now.

Success: A loving foster family

Tuesday, May 09, 2006

ERIN ALBERTY
THE SAGINAW NEWS

A guy could do worse than Joshua Lipe, but you might not have guessed it seven years ago.

The athletic college sophomore doesn't have to squint too hard at his shadow to see an overweight, ridiculed, D-average fifth-grader. That kid's still there, right along with the angry foster child and the excited eighth-grader with his first-ever perfect report card.

To everyone else, they look so different. Lipe knows it's all in the context, all in the setting.

All in the family.

Seeking solutions

Ann Shea expects foster children to become healthy, productive grown-ups.

The state caseworkers she supervises in Saginaw County can't ask for less, she says, because they often are the only adults to expect anything from their charges after they've grown too old for foster care.

"The support system is what's missing for these kids," Shea says. "Even the most intelligent, well-raised children are not independent at 18 or 19."

While resources have improved in recent years for "age-outs" -- foster children who become adults while still in the care of the state -- this group of young people remains vulnerable.

"In many respects, those transitional services are there, but there isn't really any way for us to ensure their help in a new life or adulthood," says Chief Probate Judge Faye M. Harrison, who oversees family and juvenile cases and authorizes foster placements in Saginaw County.

Today, the Saginaw News looks at the challenges "the system" faces in rearing abused and neglected children and how it can improve the transition into grown-up life.

Foster parents to dozens

Lipe considers himself one of the lucky ones, a conclusion he says has a lot to do with Wayne and Cheri Schramm.

The Schramms live in what was a modest ranch house when they bought it 20 years ago. They didn't need a lot of space; they lost their only son, Matthew, in a go-carting crash when he was 7. The Schramms would never have another baby.

Today, a maze of additions spider off the Thomas Township house. Awkward, colorful piles of plastic sports equipment teeter over the doormats in a side foyer. A winding path of hallways and stairs leads to a dining room. The table is 14 feet long, but it looks longer when no one is sitting at it.

The flood hits at 3 p.m. Eleven pairs of feet thunder through the house.

The diverse crowd of 11- to 21-year-olds does not fan out to separate rooms or turn on the home's 10 TVs. They congregate in the kitchen, where Cheri, 51, is passing out brownies. Two boys pour a jigsaw puzzle onto a table. One of them sings. A 12-year-old girl curls up on a nearby couch with a book called "Devotionals for Kids."

For six years, this was Lipe's scene. While the Schramms have housed 35 foster children in the last 15 years, they were Lipe's first and only foster parents.

Finding a good match

Workers know that stability for foster children is paramount.

Still, frequent moves -- usually at least one within the year or so the average foster child in Michigan spends in the system -- belie the knowledge that it's not good for the kids.

"(Placement stability) definitely, for a number of years, has been one of our most significant goals," Shea says.

A 2004 report by the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care points to high rates of homelessness and unemployment among adults who bounced from home to home during long spells in foster care.

Kids can't learn to fit into the adult world when the adult world keeps changing on them, Shea says.

First, she says, they often blame themselves at least in part when they are forced to leave yet another home. That reinforces any self-esteem problems they already have.

Second, if children do not stay in one place, they do not have time to form bonds with the adults around them and may quit trying.

"I was seen as just a person who was living there," says Brandon Seder, 20, a Freeland age-out who moved eight times after he entered the county foster system at age 12. He never lived with the Schramms.

"I don't blame (the parents.) You get jumped around so often, why form a relationship when (you're) going to be gone in a few years, a few months, a few days?"

A 2002 federal review of Michigan's foster system found that while caseworkers did all they could to find stable placements about 90 percent of the time, "children often are placed on the basis of what is available rather than what is the best match for the child."

In one case, the report notes, the state placed a child younger than 2 in a shelter for a month before finding a foster home.

In the last two years, Saginaw County has started to include more voices from the child's home life -- relatives, neighbors, church members, educators and parents -- in tailoring placement decisions.

"Your goal is to get them back into their home environment or neighborhood to start functioning on a more normal level," Shea says.

That can reduce the moves and give birth parents the support they need to recover their children, she says.

But sometimes the home environment is too bad to go back to.

Veggies, rules, affection

Such is the case for most of the Schramm household, where Lipe lived. The couple has adopted six of the 11 children who live with them.

Even those who are awaiting word on whether they will return to their birth parents aren't sure they want to.

A high school sophomore -- The Saginaw News is not identifying her for her protection - - discovered she was the "smartest in the grade" once she transferred to the small, religious school the Schramms use for most of the kids.

Another girl, who came to the Schramms just weeks ago, rests her head on Cheri's shoulder and calls her "Mom."

"It's going to hurt me so bad if they take me away, or if they take my brothers and sisters away," she says.

When she first arrived, she wouldn't have said that, she admits. It's not easy to go from no supervision to no cussing.

Lipe can sympathize. With his birth parents, he went to bed when he wished, bathed when he wished, ate when and what he wished, went to school when he wished.

"My parents just didn't know how to raise kids right," he says.

When the state took Lipe to the Schramms at 11, he faced structure for the first time. They had rules. They had punishments.

They had vegetables.

"There were always arguments about bedtimes, mealtimes, school," he recalls.

Wayne Schramm has come to expect it.

"(Lipe) was like every foster kid," he says. "They're usually in bad shape when they come. You spend time working with him, and he comes around."

Tough cases

New foster parents often don't realize how hard that is, Shea says.

"People think of foster care, and they think of an older child who's been neglected, and it's, 'Oh, they must be so grateful now to be living with someone who's getting them up and sending them to school and making them do things,'" Shea says.

"But it isn't always the truth. A child who's been able to raise (himself) isn't going to be open to going to a home where he must go to school, have a curfew, must keep clean. The older you are, the harder it is to move away from what you're living in -- even if that is chaos."

For older children, the ones who likely will not return to their parents, problems are more likely. Federal statistics from 2005 show rates of problem behaviors reported for foster children 11 and older are up to 50 percent higher than those reported for younger groups.

The same report shows foster children older than 11 scored lower on IQ tests than did younger foster children, and older children likely experienced abuse -- particularly physical and sexual abuse -- for longer spells in their birth homes than did younger foster children.

This can make foster parents for teenagers difficult to recruit and more difficult to keep, Shea says. Even small measures, she says, could help foster parents stay on board.

First, they need more information about children's' behavior before agreeing to take them in, the 2002 audit found.

They also need more support. As the county pushes for more "kinship" foster placements, it should give a stipend to those relatives, just as it does for unrelated foster parents, Judge Harrison says.

Some Saginaw groups also have experimented with volunteer and charitable efforts for older foster children, such as free memberships to the YMCA, religious youth groups, volunteer mentors and even additional counseling so that the challenge of rehabilitating and raising a wounded child doesn't fall so squarely on the foster parents.

"This is a rough group of kids," Shea says. "The kids are transitioning, and they carry a lot of baggage."

Letting the baggage go

Lipe can't tell when -- or whether -- he totally dumped his. It was a gradual slope of small concessions: eating at a table, eating at dinnertime; solving a math problem, finishing an assignment.

Getting through a day of his new school was a tedious affair at first. Then he noticed the other kids weren't teasing him anymore. He no longer smelled bad.

Then he started to get the kind of grades teachers punctuate with exclamation points.

In sixth grade, he brought home his first "A." In eighth grade, he was among the top 10 students at Hemlock Middle School.

School became Lipe's haven. The Schramms noticed and started talking to him about college -- a step he hadn't considered in his old life.

Still, that old life held like tendrils to his memory. While the Schramms adopted his sisters and brother, Lipe held out some hope his birth parents would come around. He stayed in touch until high school.

"There's a whole lot of stuff there that isn't settled," he acknowledges.

Lipe moved on. He joined a school group on a visit to Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids. His foster caseworker helped him get financial aid.

Now he's majoring in history and plans to teach high school.

Making the move

While social workers stress that education is the key to a successful age-out, not every teenage foster child benefits from such meticulous planning.

"I would like to see some earlier job training, and perhaps more intensive preparation for the work world," Harrison says. "Anything we can do to give these kids a sense of positive achievement would make a difference."

The same effort should go into finding places for them to live, says Archibald Lewis, who has admitted several former foster children into the young adults' center he oversees at the Innerlink Transitional Living shelter in Saginaw.

"It seems like it's a hurry-up-and-get-this-done, rushed situation," Lewis says. "I never understood why they would wait until it is time for them to be aged out of foster care to find an alternative living arrangement."

The system and the foster children themselves share responsibility for that, Shea says. A reticent teen may shoot down every living arrangement his caseworker suggests, no matter what it is, she says.

The same attitude sometimes keeps children from opting to stay in foster care after they turn 18. "Transitional living" wards can receive living stipends and visits from their caseworker until they are 20.

"They're so anxious to get out of the system, and they've never had direction and discipline," says Jean Traxler, a foster caseworker who specializes in older children.

"If you're 18, 19, and you think you know it all, you ask for your case to be closed early. Then you find out, 'It's harder than I thought.'"

Still other former foster children do not know what services they may receive, as Nicole Beemon, a Saginaw 21-year-old, learned this year at a statewide conference for teenage and former foster youths. As they compared stories, she says, they discovered an array of resources they had never heard of.

Beemon, for example, didn't know she was eligible for college tuition vouchers. Seder, the Freeland 20-year-old, says he still owes \$600 in doctors' bills he could have avoided with Medicaid.

Making these connections is a goal of the Jim Casey Youth Initiative, a privately-funded support and advocacy group for older and former foster kids. The members, ages 14 to 21, meet twice a month and receive a stipend every time they attend. State caseworkers keep tabs on things the members are trying to get done, such as getting a state ID card or finding discounts on a suit for job interviews.

The consistent contact with adults is key, Shea says, not just for moral support and lofty advice, but also for the nitty-gritty of growing up.

"If someone says, 'I want to go to Delta,' and you say, 'Well, go out to the college and check it out,' it'll never happen," she says.

They may need someone to help them schedule campus visits, fill out scholarship forms, line up recommendations, get high school transcripts. They may need rides to the ACT test site, to interviews, to the stationery store, to the post office.

"These are things a parent at home would usually see to," Shea says.

The Jim Casey group is trying to find volunteer mentors for older foster kids and age-outs, but it's a hard cause to sell, Shea says.

"When there's such a long waiting list for kids even for Big Brothers Big Sisters, getting people for the older ones is even harder."

If nothing else, she says, mentorship can give the youths the sense that there is at least one adult who cares enough to expect good things from them.

"Attachment to at least one person" is the No. 1 factor in a foster child's age-out, Harrison says.

"I don't care if it's a relative, a caseworker or a teacher, but there needs to be an attachment to someone who is there for them," she says. "Every kid I've ever seen make it has made a connection with somebody."

Keeping connected

Even though Lipe is on a roll, his caseworker still travels to Grand Rapids, and the Schramms have come to visit twice. They'd like to go more often, Wayne says, but it's tricky with 13 people.

And even though Lipe technically is out of his foster parents' care, he still calls two or three times a week and visits monthly. He alternately refers to them by their first names and as "my mom" and "my dad."

"I have a better relationship with Wayne now than I did when I was living there," Lipe says. "I talk to him about anything now."

Comparing his situation to that of many other former foster children -- the ones who are homeless, unemployed, incarcerated, depressed or simply alone -- Lipe gives himself only so much credit.

"A lot of it goes with the foster family," he says. "I had a good school and good friends. I had a good moral base. I was rewarded for doing good things, and I was told to keep on trying when I failed.

"I just had a loving family."

Erin Alberty is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9673.

Turning of troubled lives

Sunday, May 07, 2006

ERIN ALBERTY at **THE SAGINAW NEWS**

Adulthood might have started differently if Brandon J. Seder had stuck it out in foster care until his 18th birthday. He had only a few months to go.

But when you've been abandoned, moved, beaten, separated from your brothers, moved, beaten, abandoned, moved and moved while in the care of adults, you'd just as soon take care of yourself.

"I'm leaving," he announced to his last foster parents, the ones he had in Mayville. "Don't bother calling the cops."

Seder had with him a bag of stuff: clothes, a bit of money and some dishes and toiletries an anonymous donor had sent him after his name appeared on one of those gift trees at Christmas with a note requesting "things I'll need when I'm independent."

He left the microwave behind. You can't walk from Mayville to Saginaw with a microwave.

His foster dad told him to leave his other things, too. Then he showed Seder the door.

The police didn't stop him. In law enforcement terms, a 17-year-old is an adult -- not a runaway.

This year, some 50 foster children out of 530 in Saginaw County are poised to "age out" -- that is, become too old for the system.

Growing up is different for every person who ends childhood in the state's care. Seder, now 20, ran away early. Another drifted in and out of the system before landing on the streets. Another was left on the curb outside a homeless shelter two days after her birthday.

A lucky one has foster parents who sent him to private school and then to college.

What they share is an adult world that earned their mistrust long ago.

In the coming days, The Saginaw News will examine this often-severe version of independence.

In the county's support group for state-raised teens and young adults, five of six former foster kids were homeless at some point since they aged out. From there, they have moved respectively into jail, depression and poverty.

Some of them have worked things out.

Some haven't.

LESSON 2: Neglect doesn't make you stronger.

When he left Mayville, Seder, like most foster kids, had some experience living without grown-ups' help. When he was 12, his mom said his dad abused her. She left. Seder's dad was "never around," he says.

No one told Seder he was leaving home until a social worker showed up at his middle school with his suitcase and his little brothers.

The other kids in their first foster home were more difficult than the parents. One climbed on top of his 7-year-old brother and told him, "I'm going to make you my Little Red Riding Hood." At the next place, an older girl beat Seder while the foster parents sat and laughed.

The state investigated that home for other license violations, Seder later learned.

"You meet some really weird people in foster care," he says.

Seder admits he was no delight, either. After a year or two in the system, he bashed his head through the wall of his foster parents' trailer home. Caseworkers moved him away from his two brothers and placed him in a couple of group homes -- higher-security foster placements where especially troubled youths receive intensive counseling.

In ninth grade, Seder went back to his mother, who had moved up north along with one of his brothers. Seder shot to senior math and advanced chemistry. Things were going well until a big fight with his mom over whether he could go to a high school dance.

Seder moved back to his father's house in Saginaw. He got into computers and made a program that has something to do with Chaos Theory and helps pick lottery numbers. Seder says his dad started selling it and then stopped showing up at home again.

That led to Seder's last round of foster care. Two or three placements later, he decided living on his own wouldn't prove any worse than it was when his parents left him. He walked for eight hours, empty-handed, from Mayville to a friend's house in Saginaw. Seder tried to reach his father, but he had moved away the previous year. The next day, Seder checked into the City Rescue Mission. The nights are very quiet in a homeless shelter, he learned. It was about then Seder realized he didn't have a plan. "All I thought was, 'How did I get myself into this mess?'" For children taken from their parents, returning to their biological families isn't always the answer. Many, such as Seder, do try.

A 2005 University of Chicago study of 19-year-old former foster children in the Midwest showed some 35 percent of respondents living with family. Almost two-thirds said they felt at least "somewhat close" to their mothers, though that number plunged with regard to fathers.

But many more do not reconnect. The New York City-based Children's Aid Society estimates 12 to 30 percent of aged-out foster youths find themselves homeless.

Homelessness, in turn, makes a poor jumping-off point for a group of young people in which fewer than half have graduated from high school, 40 percent have children and 60 percent have held no job continuously for one year, studies indicate.

Social workers, psychologists and policy makers are beginning to view those factors as symptoms of another problem: Even children who become adults under optimal circumstances don't usually do it at 18.

"If a child lost all adult support on their 18th birthday, they'd probably have a nervous breakdown," says Vanessa Brooks Herd, a social work professor at Saginaw Valley State University.

Fifty-one percent of American 18- to 24-year-olds lived at home in 2000, census figures show. In a running survey of college students and recent graduates who visit MonsterTrak.com, more than 60 percent say they plan to move home in the future, and nearly 40 percent expect financial support from their parents.

A 2003 study by the National Opinion Research Center, based at the University of Chicago, shows the average American believes true adulthood doesn't begin until 26 and expects young people to live with parents until age 21.

Even that is optimistic for the 4 million adults between 25 and 34 who lived with their parents in 2000 because of economic hardship, census figures indicate.

Neglect in childhood adds hurdles, Brooks Herd says.

"They need everything a kid would need from a family intact -- and they need more," she says.

"Being abandoned or abused as a child severely alters your sense of self-esteem for the long-term. You can get over that, but you have to have a lot of support."

LESSON 3: You don't get to go to jail right after you steal a deck of cards.

In the month Seder spent at the Rescue Mission, his body mass index dropped to what health professionals define as "starvation" levels -- 130 pounds at 6-foot-1. He didn't know how to get food stamps, and shelter rations don't keep up with a teenage boy's appetite, he says.

A caseworker invited Seder to the courthouse so the state could "emancipate" him. A judge gave him a paper inscribed with a lot of parenthetical phrases and the word "hereby." He folded it up and moved in with a friend he met at a soup kitchen.

It took about a week for Seder to decide emancipation hadn't helped.

The best way to kill himself, he determined, was to jump into the Saginaw River. He lists several reasons for this. He was so skinny he unquestionably would sink; the current would sweep him out of the reach of any rescue attempt; and he can't swim, so he couldn't change his mind.

"And I didn't have a gun, and I didn't want to run into traffic because there's a chance it won't kill you," he says.

Of course, Seder thought, there's no need to rush these things.

He gave himself a week to come up with a better plan.

And he did: Jail. There he would at least get enough food.

Seder walked to a discount store in Saginaw Township, shoved some card games conspicuously under his jacket and marched past security.

Another judge sentenced him to fines he couldn't pay and community service he didn't finish.

The cops picked him up a year later -- about a month after he met the girl he would marry. He went to jail for three months. He turned 19 there.

"It was still better than foster care," he says.

Linda Moten-Elliott is a social worker with Saginaw Psychological Services, a private clinic that works with the foster system and the state Department of Corrections. As a matter of form, she asks every parolee and probationer she counsels if they ever were in foster care as children.

About 40 percent say yes, Moten-Elliott estimates.

"Sometimes -- several times -- I have seen children who have been in foster care from working with their parents. Then I get them as juvenile (justice) cases, and then later on as an adult in corrections," she says.

In the 2005 University of Chicago study, respondents reported above-average rates of almost all listed delinquent and violent behaviors.

"Many of these young people live what they learn," says Chief Probate Judge Faye M. Harrison, who oversees family and juvenile court cases in Saginaw County.

"They've grown up in families where parents have been abused themselves and have become abusive, where parents have been involved in the criminal justice system. That's what these kids pick up and learn."

When abuse damages children's relationship with authority, it often leaves them unresponsive to the overtures of a well-intentioned foster parent or social worker, says Ann Shea, who supervises foster caseworkers for the Saginaw County Department of Human Services.

"They might say, 'You tell me you'll love me, but I'm going to prove you wrong, I'm going to prove to you that I'm unworthy,' " Shea says.

When the sabotage works and the child has to move to yet another placement, Shea explains, it only reaffirms the disdain and hurt.

Add to that repressed anger from abuse and the natural rebelliousness of adolescence, and the rules may not stand alone, Shea says. If the cycle doesn't stop before the child ages out, opportunities to regain the child's trust slip away and the consequences of misbehaving suddenly become more serious.

LESSON 4: It's easier to find happiness with a new pair of glasses.

Seder left jail last summer feeling more like a grown-up but with an attitude he had left behind in elementary school: He looked forward to life again.

He lived with a friend and started dating Johanna Osier, the young woman he'd met right before his sentence started.

"It felt like we'd been together for years," says Johanna, 19.

The two married in October and moved in with her parents in Freeland. Their first baby arrived last month. It's a girl: Skye Angeline.

Seder's other major life event is on his face: Wire-rimmed glasses that cost \$261, money he cobbled together from temp jobs at McCray Press in Midland and Leaman's Green Applebarn near Freeland.

The glasses come up five or six times in an hour-long conversation. His wife accidentally stepped on his old ones, which actually were broken for years because he used to throw them against the wall when he was angry. He glued them back together and wore them for weeks at a 30-degree angle to his face.

The new ones are Seder's biggest purchase ever except for an Xbox, which someone stole a couple of years ago.

The glasses have become something of a starting line to Seder. He couldn't envision a dignified job interview with the old glasses. He has skipped essentials such as a \$50 General Education Development test and a \$10 state I.D. card to save money because "even \$10 is hard to get." Meanwhile, he still has \$600 in medical bills from a couple years back, when he punched a door after arguing with a roommate.

And now a baby. More than anything, Seder is looking forward to her first laugh.

Skye is eligible for Medicaid, and his wife's aunt promises to baby-sit. But the expense is daunting for a couple relying on the good graces of family. Neither has worked full-time in months, and launching their dream careers -- Web development for him, obstetrics for her -- requires an investment they know will become easier to put off as diapers become training wheels, then dance lessons and summer camp.

But for right now, those worries fade behind the halo the new father sees over his month-old daughter.

"I know in a lot of cases the (foster) kid grows up and abuses his own kid, but I can't do that,"

Seder says. "I'm married, I'm starting my own family, I'm actually getting my life settled.

"I actually have things that I've always wanted."

Erin Alberty is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9673.

Man pleads to murder in death of woman

Tuesday, May 9, 2006

lturner@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8564

A man who knocked down an 83-year-old woman during a robbery, inflicting injuries that caused her death five days later, pleaded guilty Monday to second-degree murder.

Charles Stephen Ryder, 41, will spend at least 23 years in prison for the death of Terissa Wood under a plea agreement with the Kalamazoo County Prosecuting Attorney's Office.

"I hit the old woman, your honor," Ryder told Kalamazoo County Circuit Judge Richard Ryan Lamb, who heard Ryder's plea Monday. "With my fist. In her jaw.

"She fell backwards, your honor, hit her head on a bookcase."

Ryder and Casey Scofield-Christman went to the home of Richard and Terissa Wood on Sept. 12 while looking for money to buy drugs, authorities have indicated.

Scofield-Christman, 24, was sentenced in March to 10 to 30 years in prison for home invasion. He said he took Richard Wood's wallet but didn't hurt anyone.

Ryder also had been charged with felony murder, which carries a mandatory life sentence; home invasion; two counts of assault with intent to rob while unarmed; and conspiracy to commit unarmed robbery. Those charges have been dropped.

During Ryder's preliminary hearing in January, 84-year-old Richard Wood said the two men asked to use the couple's phone because their car had broken down. When he opened the door, "they pushed me," he said. Wood said he fell, his glasses were broken and his jaw was dislocated.

Although Richard Wood said it was Scofield-Christman who assaulted his wife, Ryder's attorney said he was mistaken and that it was his client.

"Mr. Ryder sincerely regrets his actions," Gary Giguere said. "He feels very, very badly about it.

Pat Wood and Diane Walters, daughters of the Woods, said they agreed with the plea arrangement.

"We didn't want to go to trial," Pat Wood said. "My dad wouldn't have made it. He's deteriorating. He's getting confused.

"It would have been their 63rd (wedding) anniversary today. My mother didn't deserve this."

Tuesday, May 09, 2006

A child is waiting

Family could bring out girl's potential

Rosemary Dorr / Special to The Detroit News

Looking at smiling Makiah, it would seem she doesn't have a worry in the world. Not so, because the 12-year-old has experienced hurts and losses that sometimes continue to trouble her.

Still, the likable, often teasing sixth-grader proclaims, "I'm nice," then says with a giggle, "when I want to be."

Makiah's foster mother of four months agrees, noting that Makiah does better one-on-one. She adds, "She'll do something if you ask her to, and she has made gains."

Smiling, Makiah says, "I like to draw, especially pictures of my sisters and brothers, watch the Disney Channel on TV, play outside and talk to my friends." She likes animals and anything colored purple, says school is "OK," and thinks her biggest difficulty is "schoolwork sometimes. It's hard."

To Makiah, trust is the most important thing between friends. And in a family, "The important thing is love." What she would bring to a family, she promises, "is kindness."

Her adoption worker, noting that Makiah's 14-year-old brother is also waiting for adoption, says, "Makiah needs a patient, committed and resourceful family that will help her to work through issues. A loving family."

If you might consider adoption, please talk with Alice Johnson at Homes for Black Children, (313) 961-4777.

Last column's child: Heather, 12, is a sensitive, friendly, helpful child who is learning coping skills. For information, call Bonnie Powers at Wayne County Department of Human Services, (313) 396-0394.

A child is waiting appears Tuesdays in Features.